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ABSTRACT

Nursery teachers in Greece were surveyed to determine their definition of behavior problems and their relevance to management techniques employed. A questionnaire was developed and distributed to 225 nursery teachers; 154 teachers returned the questionnaire for 280 children perceived to be exhibiting behavior problems. The findings showed that nursery teachers define behavior problems in terms of both children's holistic development and the aims and goals of the educational setting. With regard to management techniques, nursery teachers tend to use a wide range of techniques of different theoretical orientation across all behavior problems, but they also deliver punishment. The disturbing effect of behavior problems and the ease of use of management techniques were revealed as the two primary factors that primarily guide teachers' decisions for the use of management techniques. The contribution of the effectiveness of management approaches in such decisions was not clearly supported in this study. The findings indicated that although nursery teachers define behavior problems in light of both children's holistic development and the aims and goals of education, when it comes to management techniques, classroom processes and pragmatics seem to be more influential factors for their use. The implication of these findings with regard to teachers' initial and in-service training are discussed. (Contains 101 references.) (Author/AMC)

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Behaviour Problems in the Early Years: Terminology used and its implication for intervention

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted in Greece to investigate nursery teachers' definition of behaviour problems and their relevance to management techniques employed. A questionnaire was developed and distributed to 225 nursery teachers. 154 teachers returned the questionnaire completed for 280 children perceived to be exhibiting behaviour problems. The total pupil sample was 3.091.

The findings showed that nursery teachers define behaviour problems in terms of both children's holistic development, and the aims and goals of the educational settings. With regard to management techniques, nursery teachers tend to use a wide range of techniques of different theoretical orientation across all behaviour problems. They use mainly positive ways to deal with children's behaviour problems, but they do also deliver punishment. The disturbing effect of behaviour problems and the ease use of management techniques revealed to be two factors which primarily guide teachers' decisions for the employment of management techniques. The contribution of the effectiveness of management approaches in such decisions was not clearly supported in this study.

In general, the findings have indicated that although nursery teachers define behaviour problems in the light of both children's holistic development and the aims and goals of education, when it comes to management techniques classroom processes and pragmatics seem to be more influential factors for their employment. The implication of these findings with regard to teachers' initial and in-service training will be discussed in the paper.

INTRODUCTION

In the literature, there is a great variation in the terminology relating to the concept of behaviour problems. Professionals from different disciplines working with children tend to use different terms for apparently similar conditions and often similar terms for different conditions (Upton,1983; Kauffman,1989). Many factors seem to contribute to such diversity in the terminology of behaviour problems. These include the many theoretical perspectives available, the varieties of professional training experiences, the range of situations in which professional encounter children exhibiting behaviour problems, the problems associated with the assessment process and the way in which intervention might be planned (McLoughlin and Lewis,1986; Upton,1983; Epstein et al.,1977). According to Kauffman (1989) definitions should serve the purposes of the agents who use them, while Epstein et al. (1977) state that definitions should be useful in indicating which and how interventions will be implemented. Such definitions are usually known as 'administrative' and they are found in rules and regulations of governmental agencies which primarily guide the delivery of services and resources to children (Epstein et al.,1977).

DIFFERENT THEORETICAL APPROACHES

Historically terminology used for behaviour problems for administrative purposes and its definition seem to have been influenced by the particular theoretical perspectives which have dominated the field over time (Davie,1986). In this paper, such terminology will be briefly reviewed considering the relevant theoretical models and approaches.

The medical model

According to biogenetic and psychodynamic theories behaviour problems are the visible symptoms of internal, invisible and unconscious impulses and conflicts, which are set by an inherited biological disposition and/or by events of the first years of life (Rezmierski and

Kotre,1974; Sagor,1974; Davie,1986). Both theories represent the medical model known as the disability paradigm of emotional disturbance (Rhodes,1974) which implies that children who exhibit behaviour problems are sick and they are suffering from some kind of illness that prevents normal adjustment (Upton,1983).

Many authors have questioned the value of the medical model in educational settings as being of little help to teachers (Paul,1982a). Teachers need specific, clear definitions relating directly to classroom intervention (Samuels,1981). In fact, the growth of special education programmes, during 1950s and 1960s led to such terms as 'maladjustment' and 'emotional disturbance' whose definitions were more closely related to children's classroom behaviour (Kauffman,1989). 'Maladjustment' is defined as emotional instability or psychological disturbance which require special educational treatment in order to effect children's personal, social or educational readjustment.(DES.1955). While, 'emotional disturbance' is defined as the condition where children are poor learners, although potentially able to learn, having few if any satisfactory interpersonal relationships, behaving oddly or inappropriately; being depressed or unhappy and developing illnesses and phobias. These children's characteristics are manifested to a marked degree over a period of time (Bower, 1982).

In the light of the medical model, the psychoeducational approach was developed in order to deal with children's behaviour problems. According to this approach, teachers' major goal is to understand why children behave as they do and to establish a positive, trusting and meaningful relationship. The psychoeducational approach places emphasis on accepting children as they are, developing a mentally healthy classroom atmosphere, providing order and routine in the classroom schedule, and eliminating external stimuli causing disturbance (Shea and Bauer.1987). Expressive arts, counselling and 'surface' behaviour management are some of the techniques used within the psychoeducational approach. Expressive arts address children's inner world by

encouraging and providing them opportunities to express indirectly negative feeling and emotions in an acceptable manner (Axline.1989). Counselling allows children to talk through their difficulties so that they will move beyond their own perceptions of events and see how their feelings have affected their perceptions, and develop socially acceptable behaviours (Geldard and Geldard, 1997). 'Surface' behaviour management is used to deal with overt behaviour which interferes with daily functioning and/or is harmful to the child him/herself or others (Shea and Bauer.1987).

The behavioural model

In contrast to the biogenetic and psychodynamic theories, behaviourism is concerned with observable behaviour and the ways with which this behaviour is learned rather than inner mental processes (Davie,1986; Kauffman,1989). In line with Watson's and Skinner's work, behaviourists explain behaviour through classical and operant conditioning, considering reinforcement and reward as being of paramount importance (McBurnett et al.1989). In this context, new terms such as behavioural disorders/disability were introduced to define problems of behaviour more in terms of learning and less in terms of internal psychological states (Paul,1982b).

The term 'behavioural disorders' is mainly used by educators to indicate those children "... who chronically and markedly respond to their environment in socially unacceptable and or personally unsatisfying ways, but who can be taught more socially acceptable and personally satisfying behavior" (Kauffman,1977, p.23). Graubard (1973), however, is in favour of the term 'behavioural disabilities' which is defined as "... a variety of excessive, chronic, deviant behaviors ranging from impulsive and aggressive to depressive and withdrawal acts (a) which violate the perceiver's expectations of appropriateness and (b) which the perceiver wishes to see stopped" (p.246). The term behavioural disabilities seems to be more inclusive as it acknowledges

individual children's thoughts and internal affective states, even though these are seen as arising from environmental events (Kauffman.1982).

On the basis of this theoretical background, behaviourally oriented professionals devised and implemented strategies and techniques which intend to either enhance positive behaviour or reduce negative behaviour by using reinforcement and punishment, respectively. (Nelson and Rutherford Jr., 1988; Kazdin,1990). Both behaviour enhancement and behaviour reduction techniques and procedures have been found applicable in the classroom and across all group ages and all kinds of behaviour problems (Atwater and Morris,1988; Nelson and Rutherford Jr.,1988; Wheldall and Merrett,1992). In general teachers tend to work on procedures and techniques that redirect pupils toward appropriate behaviour (Trovato et al., 1992). Some researchers have reported mild punitive techniques to be effective, but generally punishment is considered as the least effective intervention (Caffyn,1987; Wheldall and Merrett,1992).

However, the behavioural approach still remains a controversial issue in dealing with children's behaviour problems. Many teachers seem to be reluctant in using it on the grounds that techniques are not easily acquired, they are time-consuming and difficult to apply with consistency in the classroom context, they interfere with the teaching and learning process, they often require materials which are expensive to be used as reinforcers, and they involve manipulation of children's behaviour without their consent and often against their will (Fontana,1988; Nelson and Rutherford Jr., 1988).

The Cognitive approach

By the end of the 1970s researchers started to question the emphasis given to overt behaviour and shifted their interest to the study of cognitive concepts. Bandura (1977) feeling that behaviourism failed to explain complex types of behaviour introduced the social learning theory which

acknowledges the contribution of the individual's cognitive abilities in the process of learning. Affective variables such as feelings, thoughts and interpersonal relationships and the way they affect cognition and the process of learning in general have also started to be studied (Carpenter and Apter,1988; Ingram and Scott,1990; Goleman,1996; Mayhew,1997; Wilks,1998).

Such developments in psychological thinking have led to the cognitive approach and the term 'emotional and behavioural difficulties' was introduced in the field. This term signifies an attempt to move away from definitions which emphasise observable behaviour only and to consider children's affective and emotional state as well (Williams,1991). Bowman (1990) states that pupils labelled emotionally/behaviourally difficult have "...unmet affective and social needs which unfavourably mediate learning experiences" (p.198), while Williams (1991) observes that emotional and behavioural difficulties cover a wide range of psychological problems, ranging from chronic disorders to temporarily troubled behaviour.

In the light of this framework the cognitive-emotional interventions were developed to manage children's behaviour problems (Carpenter and Apter.1988). These interventions place emphasis on processes and aim to actively involve children's cognition (Carpenter and Apter.1988, Kazdin,1990). According to Kellian theory, the more individuals understand about their own constructs the more effective they can be in identifying desirable change and the more effective they can be in bringing it about (Fontana, 1988). Nursery and primary school children being at a developmental stage where their cognition is not highly developed often do not know what is acceptable or what is expected from them. Sometimes they are not even aware that their behaviour is irritating and disturbing (Fontana,1985). Teachers then tend to adopt interventions which emphasise the important role of emotions, cognition and cognitive processes in the manifestation and change of overt behaviour.

Cognitive interventions aim for children to increase their coping-skills when they are confronted with situations and events outside of their control and to develop problem-solving skills by emphasising rationality. They embrace a wide range of approaches and techniques that have emerged from developmental theories, social psychology and applied behaviour analysis (Carpenter and Apter.1988). These include instructions, guidance, emphasising rationality, role play and behaviour rehearsals. Instructions and guidance clearly state specific skills to be taught and rationales provide the reason for learning these skills. In both role-play and behaviour rehearsals pupils rehearse how to behave in situations which may cause difficulties (Fontana, 1985; Morgan and Jenson, 1988).

The 'affective education' and the 'self-control' curriculum have also been designed to help pupils to increase awareness and understanding of personal emotions, values and attitudes through educational activities. They include games, role play, story telling, lessons and discussions implemented in small developmental steps providing positive feedback (Shea and Bauer,1987; Bauer and Shea,1988, Geldard and Geldard,1997).

Although some techniques used in the cognitive approach seem to overlap with those used in the psychoeducational approach, still the cognitive approach is broader in the sense that it aims to deal with both the causes of a problem and the particular symptoms exhibited (Carpenter and Apter,1988). Ingram and Scott (1990) argue that the incorporation of cognition in behaviour change represents a gradual shift in focus rather than an abrupt change in theoretical orientation, while Carpenter and Apter (1988) state that the cognitive techniques are commonly pragmatics hybrids borrowing from other theories.

The fact that most of the cognitive techniques constitute an essential part of any early years curriculum seems to make them nursery teachers' preferred techniques (Fontana,1985). However,

because they are used along side each other in naturalistic environments, as it is the classroom, it is often difficult to measure the effectiveness of individual techniques (Carpenter and Apter,1988).

The labelling theory/ the interactionist approach

Rhodes (1967) argues that children's behaviour should be viewed in the context of the social interrelationships in which it occurs, and the behaviourally disordered label applied to children must be understood in the context of the powerful characteristics of that social system. According to Rutter (1975) children's emotional and behavioural problems "...constitute exaggerations of or deviations from the normal rather than mental illness or diseases" (p.7). Therefore, a 'psycho-social' model was developed which implies that the interaction between a person and his or her social environment yield 'normal' or 'deviant' behaviour. This new model is known as the 'labelling theory', although because of the misleading implications of its title (label) the term 'interactionist approach' is preferred, while Rhodes (1974) refers to it as the 'deviation' paradigm.

The 'deviation' paradigm assumes and implies that the judgement of 'normal' or abnormal' behaviour depends upon the codes and taboos of individual cultures. Furlong (1985) points out that the way in which individuals in authority react to indiscipline has a profound effect on its future development. Rains et al. (1975) also observe that the labelling perspective shifts the theoretical concern from "the etiological question of deviant behaviour... to the question of how deviants are controlled...and how the label deviant systematizes and stabilizes forms of behavior among labeled individuals" (p.89).

In this aspect, the locus of responsibility is placed on professionals (Upton, 1983), since adults' attitudes, sensitivity, tolerance and ability to cope are bound to influence how children are

perceived and handled (Wicks-Nelson and Israel ,1984). Indeed, research evidence has clearly shown the effect which teachers' attitudes and expectations have teacher-pupil interactions, which in turn influence pupils' outcomes (Good and Brophy,1991; Babad,1993). Therefore, teachers and their interaction with their pupils become the focus of the behaviour management approaches (Leach,1977; Rogers, 1982).

The ecosystemic approach

By the end of the 1970s, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory begun also to influence the field of education. In ecological terms behaviour and behaviour problems are seen as the result of dynamic interrelationships and interactions between personal and environmental variables (both physical and social) (Davie,1986; Pellegrini,1987; Vasta et al.,1992). Such interactional processes are conceptualized in simple ways (now and here situations) and within the immediate environment (microsystem), and in complex ways taking into account the wider ecosystem (macrosystem). The introduction of the ecological theory was an important step in understanding the complexities of human behaviour, since instead of employing an inside-outside dichotomy, it emphasised the study of relations and placed behaviour in the wider context (Prugh et al.,1975; Burden,1981). According to the ecological theory there are no causes for a problem, but behaviour is maintained by the total interaction and not just by reinforcement (Brown,1986).

Ecologists do not speak about emotional disturbance, they speak about disturbance within the ecosystem (Feagans,1974), and indeed such terms as 'disturbing' and 'disruptive' behaviour have been introduced in the field of education. Algozzine (1980) states that the particular characteristics, which make a child an individual, may result in differential reactions from others within the child's ecosystem. In this context, the child's behaviour is seen more as 'disturbing' rather than 'disturbed'. Wood (1982) states that the term 'disturbing' directs the attention to the effects of one person's behaviour on the thoughts and feelings of one who observes the behaviour.

The term does not attempt to prejudge the nature of problems experienced by the children, and it does not rule out that these problems may have more to do with the experience which the child confronts than with any inherent defect in the child itself (Lawrence et al., 1984).

The theoretical framework of the ecological theory have led to the ecosystemic approach (Burden,1981). Ecosystemic techniques are based on the principle of "reframing" or "divergent explanations of problem behaviour". It is suggested that teachers should re-examine specific problematic situations by redefining behaviour problems, self-evaluate their own reactions to this behaviour and consider what purpose the behaviour serves for the pupil and consider other influential factors within the pupil's ecosystem (Molnar and Lindquist,1989; Conoley and Carrington Rotto,1997).

Ecosystemic techniques are not addressed to individual children only but to the whole system/school in which behaviour problems are exhibited. Teachers' understanding of how context events affect behaviour may provide important information on the basis of which intervention will then be planned, and provide important guidance for preventing or avoiding an unexpected crisis (Cooper and Upton, 1992; Conoley and Carrington Rotto,1997). In the light of these assumptions, a whole-school approach in dealing with children's problems has been developed. This approach focuses on the whole-school context and involves a radical examination of what schools offer to all children and staff. It is responsive and supportive to the needs of both, and incorporates help from parents and the community (Burden,1992; O'Brien,1998; Wilson,1998).

At a theoretical level the ecosystemic approach seems to be more promising in dealing with behaviour problems, but there is little research support for its effectiveness. It remains a proposed synthesis resistant to the quantitative methods used in the field which needs to be further studied

(Carpenter and Apter,1988). However, the ecosystemic approach seems to provide a valuable addition to what has already been achieved by other behaviour management approaches (Cooper and Upton,1992).

Teachers' definitions of behaviour problems and management techniques

It appears then that there is a lack of consensus among the terminology and definitions used for behaviour problems (Kirk and Gallagher,1989). In school context, however, according to Galloway et al (1982), most teachers have a fairly well-defined idea of what constitutes disruptive behaviour and they can identify pupils who exhibit such behaviour in their classes without much difficulty. The problem is that teachers have different ideas as to what constitute behaviour problems and tend to identify different pupils (Galloway et al.,1982; Kauffman,1989). Behaviours that are seen as disruptive by one teacher may be welcomed by another one (Galloway et al,1982), and for both the same behaviour may change its significance depending on the time of the day of the week (Lawrence et al.1984). Kauffman (1989) advocates that the identification of behaviour problems "...is a matter of judgment, an arbitrary decision based on an explicit or implicit value system" (p.130). According to Paul (1982a) children's classroom behaviour and behaviour problems must be defined and explained in a way that teachers understand, while children's needs have to be considered in the light of the goals of education, teachers' intervention and the philosophical and organizational context of the classroom and the school.

Lawrence et al (1984) state that disruption in school is "behaviour out of place" (p.17) and they stress that behaviour is not disruptive *per se*, but becomes disruptive at certain times and in certain places; the conditions for identifying disruption are a set of ordered relations and contraversion of that order; disruption is a by-product of systematic ordering and classification involving rejecting inappropriate elements. Galloway et al (1982) observe that children's

behaviour at school does not fall into two groups of normal or disruptive. Behaviour should be measured on a continuum, from extremely cooperative to totally unacceptable. Few children consistently remain at the same point of the continuum. Many misbehaviours fall within the bounds of the normal behaviour, which can be very irritating for both teachers and those pupils who are trying to concentrate on work (Mortimore et al.,1983). Therefore, Galloway et al. (1982) come to define disruptive behaviour "as any behaviour which appears problematic, inappropriate and disturbing to teachers" (p.xv), highlighting the subjective nature of the term and stressing teachers' importance as well. While, Mortimore and his colleagues (Mortimore et al.,1983) define disruptive behaviour as "any act which interferes with the learning, development or happiness of a pupil or his or her peers, or with the teacher's attempts to foster those processes or feelings" (p.1). Mortimore et al's (1983) seems to be more inclusive since it does not only take into account the disruptive element of the behaviour but it does also consider the effect of the behaviour on the child him/herself.

In terms of the management of behaviour problems, teachers use a variety and combination of management techniques of different theoretical orientation (Carpenter and Apter,1988; Morgan and Dunn,1990). They are guided by their 'common sense' (Molnar and Lindquist,1989), and employ and use whatever techniques have been proved to be effective and work with their pupils under the particular situations (Morrison and McIntyre,1973; Descombe,1985; Zabel,1988). In general teachers use positive ways to deal with children's behaviour problems, but they do deliver punishment as well (Trovato et al.,1992) although the latter has been found largely ineffective (Caffyn,1987). Teachers seem to teach the way they remember being taught themselves and they go on using traditional sanctions (Merrett and Tang,1994) which are rather classroom based than person-centred (Fantuzo and Atkins,1992). The ease with which management techniques can be applied in the classroom, and the nature and severity of behaviour problems are some of the factors that contribute to teachers' decisions about their employment (Scheider et

al,1992). Teachers tend to avoid techniques that are complicated, time-consuming and require extra material for their application (Witt and Martens,1983; Schneider et al.,1992), while Chazan and Laing (1985) argue that teachers use techniques which tend to be "more of the same" rather than of any specific approach. They employ a variety of techniques of different theoretical orientation considering the classroom pragmatics rather than their effectiveness (Witt and Martens, 1983).

Concluding remarkd on the different theoretical perspectives

The foregoing discussion has shown that there is no agreement on terminology used for and definition of behaviour problems and no single definition seems to be entirely satisfactory from an educational perspective. Children exhibiting behaviour problems do not comprise a homogeneous group. Behaviour is complex and is expressed differently in different settings. Children's behaviour affects and is affected by others with whom the children interact. In school context, it is important, as Wood (1982) suggests, that any definition of behaviour problems to include certain elements in order to be of help in understanding the philosophical and organizational context of the education, its goal and therefore the intervention planning for meeting children's needs. These elements include what or who is perceived to be the focus of the problem, how the problem is described and in what setting it occurs, who regards the behaviour as a problem, through what operations and by whom the definition is used to assess the needs of individual children and whether or not the definition provides the basis for planning intervention when operationalized.

In terms of management approaches, there is evidence -at least at a theoretical level- of a movement from a purely psychoeducational approach, which mainly addresses within the child causes, to a behavioural approach, which addresses environmental stimuli. The behavioural approach however has tended to ignore children's cognition and feelings and has not taken into

account the multi-faceted nature of behaviour problems, which, according to the ecological theory, are largely determined by the dynamic interaction processes between all parts involved within a particular ecosystem. Both cognitive and ecosystemic approaches have made important contributions to these issues.

Teachers' eclecticism with regard to behaviour management techniques seems to indicate that an integrated perspective which would consider both pupils' and teachers' experiences, and school pragmatics and emphasise the continuous and reciprocal interactions at all levels of any given ecosystem would be more promising than any approach discussed alone. The ecosystemic approach seems to offer the framework for such an integrated perspective (Burden, 1994). The underlying principles of the behavioural and cognitive approaches are important in terms of their own theoretical framework, but both can constitute integral parts of the ecosystemic approach which deals with behaviour problems at different levels of functioning.

It is important, however, to point out that such an eclecticism is likely to become an advantage, and not a confusing practice, only when teachers clearly understand why they use the techniques which they use (Fontana,1985). Martin and Norwich (1991) and Burden (1992) point out that skills-based techniques and good practice need to be placed within a conceptual framework of teaching and learning. This point becomes particularly important for the early years' professionals who are called to play a vital role in the early identification and management of young children's behaviour problems (DfEE,1997;1998).

AIMS OF THE STUDY

The present study was conducted with the aim to investigate

1. Nursery teachers' perceptions of young children's behaviour problems;

2. Nursery teachers' managemnt techniques for these behaviour problems;

3. Whether teachers' management techniques support an ecosystemic perspective.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The study was undertaken among 225 Greek nursery teachers. The method for selecting the teacher sample followed multi-stage, stratified and simple random sampling (Hannagan.1982, Borg and Gall.1989). Nine sub-groups were identified in three selected regions of Greece (Papatheodorou and Ramasut.1994). Twenty-five nursery teachers in each of the nine sub-groups were randomly selected to take part in the study (N:225). The total pupil sample was 3091 (1568 boys, 1523 girls) whose age was between 4-6 years old.

The instrument

The instrument used (appendix,1) was developed for the purpose of the present study with items elicited from the Greek nursery teachers by using the Likert-scale method (Likert,1967). Items suggested by the Greek nursery teachers for both behaviour problems and management techniques were compared with items used by other researchers to investigate behaviour problems (Rutter,1967; McGuire and Richman,1986a) and management techniques (Fontana,1985; Kerr and Nelson,1989; Montgomery,1989; DES,1989). Following this, the items were sorted for overlap and ambiguity and finally classified into broad categories of behaviour problems and management approaches (Papatheodorou.1990;1995).

Statements referring to behaviour problems were classified into three broad categories of behaviour problems found by other researchers (Behar and Stringfield,1974; Achenbach and Edelbrock,1978; McGuire and Richman,1986b). These are:

Conduct problems (acting-out behaviours) which disturb the teacher and the learning process and affect pupils' learning, e.g. aggressive behaviour, hyperactive/overacting behaviour, attention seeking and showing-off behaviours, and provocative and domineering behaviours.

Emotional problems (withdrawn behaviours) which usually do not affect the teaching process, but may affect pupils' learning, e.g. withdrawn behavour and feelings of insecurity, excessive shyness/timidity and unhappiness/depression and rejection by peers.

Developmentally related problems (immaturity) which do not necessarily disturb the teacher, but which may affect the pupils' learning and the teaching process, e.g. difficulties in cooperation and negativeness, being overprotected and poor concentration/perseverance, and lack in motor control/clumsiness.

Statements referring to management approaches were classified into three categories which have been extensively studied by other researchers, that is:

Behavioural approach is based on the main principle of the behaviourist school of thought that behaviour is learned through reinforcement (Merrett,1981; Presland,1989; Milan,1990).It included such items as immediate praise/reward for appropriate behaviour, ignoring misbehaviour, temporary removal from an inappropriate activity, regrouping and reorganising activities to encourage appropriate behaviour.

Cognitive approach is based on the assumption that changes in cognition will result in changes in behaviour (Carpenter and Apter,1988; Ingram and Scott,1990). Techniques referring to teachers' own cognition about children's state, conditions and circumstances were also included in this approach. Reasoning with the child, guidance, counselling, showing empathy/understanding,

giving chances to improve, encouragement, humour and cooperation with parents/other agencies are some of the techniques used in this approach.

Punitive approach. This is often used by teachers for short term control in the classroom without the necessary intention of changing behaviour, as it is the case of punishment in the behavioural approach (Brophy and Rohrkemper,1981). During the pilot study, respondents expressed the view that they might use mild but not severe forms of punishment. For this, the punitive approach was further split into ***mild punitive*** and ***severe.*** Mild punitive techniques included such items as reprimands, keep in during breaktime, withdrawn from favourite activities, leaving the child to face the consequences of his/her behaviour. Severe punitive techniques included shouting at/threatening the child, shaking/smaking the child, irony/sarcasm.

The final instrument constructed was piloted to test its reliability. Statistical reliability coefficient was carried out by using the split-half method and employing the alpha "a" coefficient (Downie and Heath,1983; Anastasi,1988). It was found to be .92. In the main study teachers were asked to complete the instrument for two of their pupils whom they perceived as exhibiting behaviour problems. In particular, teachers were asked to:

- identify specific aspects of their pupils' behaviours which they find problematic and to indicate the degree of seriousness, namely, "very serious", "serious", "not very serious".
- to state the management techniques which they have used to deal with these behaviour problems and indicate the frequency of use, namely "very frequent", "frequent", "not very frequent" and the effectiveness, namely "very effective", "effective", "not very effective".

In total 154 nursery teachers returned the questionnaire completed for 280 children perceived as exhibiting behaviour problems. The overall response rate was 68.4 per cent.

The SPSS PC+ package was used in the school of Education, Cardiff University to analyse data. Data discussed in the present paper are presented in simple descriptive statistics involving frequencies and percentages and the Friedman non-paremetric two-ways ANOVA (Norusis,1988). However, it is of worth noting that, in some cases where samples become small (especially with regard to severe punitive techniques), percentages may not be stable and therefore findings need to be cautiously approached (Downie and Heath.1983).

DISCUSSION

Teachers' identification and definition of behaviour problems

Table 1 shows the extent of identification of each category of behaviour problems for the 280 children perceived by their teachers as exhibiting behaviour problems of different degree of seriousness. The findings show that in each category of behaviour problems approximately 10 per cent of children's behaviours were perceived to be 'very serious' and between 45 per cent to 49 per cent of them to be in one of the three categories of seriousness. Such findings appear to be consistent with the findings of other researchers who reported conduct, emotional and developmentally related problems to be the main categories of behaviour problems identified for the same age group (Behar and Stringfield, 1974; Achenbach and Efelbrock,1978; McGuire and Richman,1986b), and in line with the definition which Mortimore and his colleagues have provided for behaviour problems in educational settings (Mortimore et al., 1983). Greek nursery teachers seem to define behaviour problems not only in terms of the disturbing effect which these problems may have on the teaching and learning procesess (e.g. conduct problems and often developmentally related problems), but they do also consider the effect which behaviour problems may have on children's well-being and development (e.g. emotional and developmentally related problems).

Table 1 also shows that combining all the degrees of seriousness, developmentally related problems were slightly more frequently identified than conduct and emotional problems. However, the non-parametric Friedman two-way ANOVA has revealed significant differences in teachers' perceptions of these three categories (table 2); teacher's identified significantly more developmentally related problems and conduct problems than emotional problems. Although teachers consider children's holistic development when they define and identify behaviour problems, they do, however, tend to attend more often behaviours which have a disturbing effect on the teaching and learning process (Galloway et al, 1982, Papatheodorou,1990).

Table 3 shows that, within each category of behaviour problems, there were specific items which were consistently identified as being "very serious" and "serious" for at least 10 per cent and 20 per cent of children, were also ranked with the same order in both categories of seriousness. These findings tend to indicate that teachers have quite clear ideas of what constitutes "very serious" and "serious" problems within the classroom context, and they identify them not only in higher percentages than other behaviours but they rank them with the same order in both categories of seriousness. The equal number of behaviours identified in each category of behaviour problems tends to support further the view that teachers define behaviour problems in terms of both classroom processes and children's well-being. The findings are also supported by findings which have been discussed elsewhere and have shown that teachers are more worried about than disturbed by children's behaviour problems (Papatheodorou.1995).

Teachers' agreement in their perceptions and identification of the seriousness of certain behaviour problems tend to indicate that they implicitly share common definitions of behaviour problems. Shared experience, knowledge and concerns, and the aims and goals of education seem to be important variables for the definition of behaviour problems (Paul,1982, Wood,1982). However, although teachers appear to be consistent in the perceptions about what constitutes "very serious"

and "serious" problems", inconsistency has been found in the degree and rank order of the identification of the same behaviours in the "not very serious" category. It seems that behaviours which are at some distance from the point of reference, in this case individual teachers' definition of behaviour problems, are judged as being less serious. It is suggested that teachers may also be influenced by their own values, norms and levels of tolerance as well as by their shared experience and the goals of education (Papatheodorou, 1995).

Teachers' management approaches

Table 4 shows that teachers used all four management approaches to deal with children's behaviour problems across all three categories of behaviour problems supporting the view that teachers use a variety of techniques of different theoretical orientation (Carpenter and Apter,1988; Trovato et al, 1992). The same table also shows that consistently a larger percentage of the management techniques were used mainly for conduct problems. These findings seem to support other researchers view that the disturbing effect of behaviour problems does affect teachers' decisions (Schneider et al, 1992).

In general, teachers used primarily behavioural and cognitive techniques to deal with children's behaviour problems (38.7 per cent and 31 per cent, respectively), but they did also employ punitive techniques (19.0 per cent mild punitive techniques and 10.5 per cent severe punitive techniques) (Table 4). These findings support Trovato et al's (1992) view that teachers use mainly positive ways to deal with children's behavioural difficulties, but they do also deliver punishment. Again, the same table shows that punishment was mainly used for conduct problems; almost half of both the mild and severe punitive techniques were used for conduct problems. It seems that behaviour problems with a disturbing effect not only initiate more management techniques, but these techniques tend to be of a punitive nature which aim to bring about immediate results (Trovato et al.1992, Merrett and Tang.1994).

Table 5 shows the "very frequent" and "frequent" use of management techniques and table 6 shows their effectiveness, that is "very effective" and "effective". The findings with regard to the effectiveness of behavioural, cognitive and mild punitive techniques may support their respective "very frequent" and "frequent" use. However, the fact that there is a large discrepancy between the extent of effectiveness of the severe punitive techniques and their extent of use raises questions about the role which effectiveness may play in the employment of management techniques. This question is further supported by the findings shown on tables 7 and 8. Severe punitive techniques and mild punitive techniques, which were reported as totally ineffective and largely ineffective, respectively, across all three categories of behaviour problems, were still employed to a considerable extent for conduct problems. The reported effectiveness of both the behavioural and cognitive techniques seems also not to justify their "very frequent" use. It may be argued then that it is probably the ease and convenient use of the management techniques, which primarily guides teachers' decisions about their employment (Trovato et al, 1992; Schneider et al,1992). This view can be seen as further reinforced by the fact that the reported "very frequent" use of cognitive techniques far more exceeded the "very frequent" use of behavioural techniques. It seems that the perceived appropriateness of the cognitive techniques for young children's developmental level and their ease use gives credence to their frequent use (Carpenter and Apter, 1988).

Such findings tend to indicate that, although teachers do take into account children's holistic development when they define and identify behaviour problem, when it comes to management techniques these seem to be mainly guided by the demands made by the teaching and learning processes of an educational setting. It seems that techniques which teachers use are not chosen in the light of their understanding of children's individual difficulties, but in the light of the

constrains of a classroom setting and the aims of the educational practice (Fantuzo and Atkins,1992).

Such findings seem to have particular implications for teachers' initial and in-service training. Training at all levels should clearly address the link and relationship between the definition of behaviour problems and management techniques employed. Such understanding will allow teachers to make informed decisions rather than to employ whatever techniques they have found to work. Teachers need to understand ***why*** they use the techniques which they do use. This point bears further implications for in-service training and continuous professional development. Courses designed for these purposes should build upon teachers' existing practice and provide opportunities for teachers to reflect on and make sense of their own practice in the light of different theoretical perspectives and approaches (Martin and Norwich,1990). As Burden (1992) argues, existing good practice within educational settings is of limited value if it is not contextualised within a coherent theory of teaching and learning, and, the writer would add, a theory of child behaviour and development in general.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the foregoing discussion has shown that teachers tend to define behaviour problems in terms of both children's holistic development and the aims and goals of the educational practice. In this aspect, it could be argued that definitions introduced for administrative purposes should be in line with teacher's own understanding of behaviour problems, so that, when they are operationalised, they should best meet the child's developmental needs and promote the aims and goals of the educational settings. However, teachers' familiarity with other terms is also important, since an understanding of the definitions of existing terminology will very much facilitate the communication and cooperation with other professionals.

In terms of the management of behaviour problems, teachers reported that they do use all four management approaches across all three categories of behaviour problems. Teachers primarily used positive ways to deal with behaviour problems, but they did also deliver punishment. All techniques, but to a large extent punitive techniques, were mainly used for conduct problems. The ease and convenient use of management techniques within classroom context seemed to be the prime influential factors in teachers' decisions about their employment, while the role of the effectiveness to such decisions remained questionable.

One might argue that the findings with regard to the effectiveness of the management techniques show that none of the management techniques is really effective, and as Chazan and Laing (1985) claim techniques which teachers use are 'more of the same'. However, in the light of the findings which have shown that in general management techniques were effective, although not very effective, the writer would tend to agree with other researchers who argue that teachers use their common sense and employ techniques which –by trial and error processes- have been found to work with individual pupils under particular circumstances (Carpenter and Apter,1988; Molnar and Lindquist,1989). This view seems to have particular implications for teacher training and especially in-service training. Initial teacher training courses need to place more emphasis on children's behaviour problems and their management (DES,1989; Martin and Norwich,1991), while in-service training should be designed to consider teachers' practices and give them credit in philosophical and theoretical orientations (Descombe,1985).

In the present study, the demonstrated teachers' eclecticism with regard to management techniques tends also to support the view that the ecosystemic approach provides the integrated perspective where teachers' practice might be placed and studied further in the light of its theoretical framework.

RESULTS

Table 1: The extent of identification and seriousness of each category of behaviour problems (N:280)

Seriousness / Category of Behaviour problems	Not very serious Serious Very serious (combined) %	Serious Very serious (combined) %	Very serious %
Conduct problems	45.6	29.0	10.8
Emotional problems	47.6	28.0	10.8
Developmentally related problems	49.0	26.6	10.6

Table 2. Friedman two-ways ANOVA results for comparing the three categories of behaviour problems

Mean Rank	Variable	Cases	Chi-square	D.F.	Significance
2.04	Conduct problems	282	18.37	2	.0001
1.80	Emotional problems				
2.16	Developmentally related problems				

Table 3: Specific aspects of behaviour identified consistently as being "very serious" and "serious" problems

Seriousness / Behaviour problems	Very serious		Serious		Not very serious	
	%	R.O.	%	R.O.	%	R.O.
Conduct problems						
Is hyperactive/overacting/hindering others	16.8	1	25.6	1	15.8	5
Is attention seeking	14.5	2	21.6	2	17.7	2
Emotional problems						
Shows withdrawn behaviour	14.8	1	22.3	1	18.7	4
Shows feelings of insecurity	13.2	2	21.5	2	20.1	2
Developmentally related problems						
Has difficulties in cooperation	12.4	1	26.5	1	25.8	1
Shows poor concentration/perseverance	12.4	2	20.9	2	17.7	5

Table 4: The extent of use of each management approach for each category of behaviour problems (N:1639).

Extent of use of management approaches / Behaviour problems	Behavioural		Cognitive		Mild punitive		Severe punitive	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Conduct problems	209	12.8	226	13.8	154	9.4	75	4.6
Emotional problems	163	9.9	219	13.4	81	4.9	48	2.9
Developmentally related problems	149	9.1	189	11.5	71	4.7	49	3.0

Table 5: The extent of "very frequent" and "frequent" use of each management approach.

Management approaches / Categories of Behaviour problems	Behavioural (N:521)		Cognitive (N:634)		Mild Punitive (N:306)		Severe Punitive (N:172)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Conduct problems	163	77.9	218	96.4	61	36.9	11	14.6
Emotional problems	140	85.5	211	96.3	31	38.2	10	20.8
Developmentally related problems	119	79.8	179	94.6	22	28.5	10	20.4

Table 6: The extent of effectiveness ("very effective" and "effective") of each management approach.

Management approaches / Categories of behaviour problems	Behavioural (N:521)		Cognitive (N:634)		Mild Punitive (N:306)		Severe Punitive (N:172)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Conduct problems	162	77.4	187	83.1	57	37.4	5	8.1
Emotional problems	125	76.6	187	85.7	23	28.7	10	8.3
Developmentally related problems	116	78.3	166	88.7	21	26.5	10	1.8

Table 7: The extent of "very frequent" use of each management approach.

Management approaches / Categories of behaviour problems	Behavioural (N:521)		Cognitive (N:634)		Mild Punitive (N:306)		Severe Punitive (N:172)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Conduct problems	73	34.9	128	56.6	11	7.8	6	8.0
Emotional problems	49	30.0	139	63.4	1	1.2	-	-
Developmentally related problems	48	28.8	111	58.7	-	-	-	-

Table 8: The extent of effectiveness ("very effective") of each management approach.

Management approaches / Categories of behaviour problems	Behavioural (N:521)		Cognitive (N:634)		Mild Punitive (N:306)		Severe Punitive (N:172)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Conduct problems	29	13.8	50	22.2	7	3.9	-	-
Emotional problems	29	17.7	74	33.9	1	1.2	-	-
Developmentally related problems	21	14.1	56	29.9	-	-	-	-

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